

In Memoriam

Gerald L. Shook (1948–2011)

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We begin our careers after graduate school with some sort of plan by which we mean to accomplish great things for our field. As our careers progress, our plans adjust to unfolding realities, and our original list of expected accomplishments becomes a more manageable size. I do not know what career objectives Jerry Shook developed during his graduate school years, but he certainly could not have forecast the path he would take, nor the impact he would have on his chosen field.

Jerry was born and raised in Michigan, so it may not be surprising that he chose Western Michigan University (WMU) for his undergraduate studies, graduating in 1970 with majors in psychology and biology. Given the behavior-analytic

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tendencies of WMU's psychology department both then and now, it is also not surprising that he stayed there to earn his Master's and doctoral degrees, which focused on his interests in applied behavior analysis (ABA). Paul Mountjoy was his major adviser.

Certainly one reason for his applied interests was the fact that throughout his years in graduate school he worked at the Kalamazoo Valley Multihandicap Center (KVMC), most of this time as its director. (This responsibility explains why he did not receive his doctorate until 1981.) KVMC was a large ABA program that served individuals with autism or other developmental disabilities and was also a practicum site for WMU students. Jerry directed and supervised practicum activities for hundreds of WMU psychology students and worked with WMU faculty who established research programs at KVMC that led to many student thesis and dissertation projects. Many established behavior analysts practicing today obtained their initial ABA training under his direction at the KVMC program.

After graduation, Jerry began what he might have intended to be a traditional career in academia. He took a position as assistant professor in the Department of Exceptional Children Education at the State University of New York College at Buffalo and, following that, as assistant professor in pediatrics in the School of Medicine at Georgetown University. In only a few years, however, he was ready for a different kind of challenge. He continued af-

filiations in higher education throughout his career, but they were adjunct relationships that were secondary to his primary focus in administrative leadership.

In 1984, Jerry applied for a position as Senior Behavior Analyst in the Developmental Services Headquarters Office of the Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services in Tallahassee. This was a new position that grew out of an increasing focus in Florida on improving its capacity to deliver effective behavior-analytic services to individuals with intellectual disabilities. Over the next 6 years, Jerry's considerable contributions established the importance of this position and set the standard for iterations in other states. He was responsible for ABA activities throughout the state, including managing its relatively new Behavior Analysis Peer Review Committee (PRC). The PRC was a powerful force for improving ABA services offered through state and provider agencies, and Jerry used it to best advantage. He lobbied for meaningful PRC budgets and gave the committee, composed of the state's leaders in ABA, an influential role in pushing for improved ABA services. In his central office responsibilities as coordinator of behavior analysis policy, budget, and legislative development, Jerry was especially good at looking for opportunities to strengthen systemic support for ABA. In one of many smart moves, for example, he was able to slip the PRC into statutory language, where it remains today. His efforts were so successful that a second ABA position was added to the department, filled by Michael Hemingway.

In hindsight, the most important role he played as Senior Behavior Analyst was in developing the emerging certification movement in Florida. By the time Jerry took the position, Hank Pennypacker, a member of the PRC, had made early efforts to probe the possibilities of a state certification program in ABA. This limited effort,

which involved informal testing of a small number of graduate students and other ABA trained agency staff, led to a state-funded contract for the development of a proper examination, and Jerry arrived as this initiative was getting underway. Over the next several years, he oversaw not only the development of the examination but also procedures for administering and scoring it, as well as early efforts to build training activities throughout the state. As a result of his efforts, Florida developed a wealth of certified behavior analysts, which continues to have a considerable impact on the availability of ABA services in the state. Jerry's experience in building a state certification program turned out to be valuable for his later development of a national certification program.

By 1990, Jerry had had enough of state government, and he turned to consulting on a full-time basis. He accumulated a long list of consulting relationships over the next 8 years, but given his experiences in Florida, his most important role involved helping other states to develop their ABA capabilities. His interest in credentialing remained strong, however. During the 1990s, a number of factors were rapidly increasing the demand for ABA services, especially in the area of autism. The publication of a book by a parent of two children who recovered from autism with intensive ABA treatment (Maurice, 1993) sparked an explosion of interest in ABA services within the energetic autism parent community. The resulting economic contingencies were encouraging therapists of all types to offer services in the area of autism as well as for other developmental disabilities.

In addition, a number of other states were developing their own certification programs using the Florida examination. Not only was the state of Florida growing weary of this supporting role, but the initiation of separate state certification systems forecast ongoing problems for the

profession, such as different standards from state to state for all of the features of a credentialing system. As it happens, however, Jerry's experience in the Florida Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services led to the opportunity to build a national certification program based on the Florida model.

In 1998, Jerry established the Behavior Analyst Certification Board (BACB) as a nonprofit corporation. Few may appreciate the courage and conviction that the formation of the BACB required. Jerry received no salary from the new BACB for some years, and he and his wife took out a second mortgage on their house. Although his experience in Florida led him to be hopeful about the venture, there was no guarantee that matters would evolve as he wished. However, in 1999 he negotiated a 5-year contract between the BACB and the state of Florida that included a transition of Florida's certification program to the BACB. The agreement allowed the new BACB to use the Florida examination and to gradually transfer ownership of the materials to the BACB. In addition, Jerry negotiated agreements with the other state certification programs to fold them into the BACB initiative, and by 2000 examinations were being conducted nationally.

Over the ensuing years, Jerry's leadership of the BACB as its executive director was masterful. Only those who have served on its board of directors can appreciate the enormous complexities in the day-to-day challenges of building a worldwide, high-stakes credentialing program that met the standards of the National Council for Certifying Agencies. The task of developing and then gradually upgrading countless systems, policies, rules, and materials required an impressive level of technical knowledge about credentialing. It also required respect for the expertise of others (including those in other professions, such as law and

professional testing), judgment about present and future contingencies, wisdom about how slowly or how quickly to move forward, and a social repertoire that would facilitate the development of professional relationships all around the world.

It could be argued that the development of a professional certification program has been the most important event in the history of ABA. Jerry was not alone in viewing this development as an inevitable aspect of the field's growth, and he certainly foresaw its powerful and far-reaching consequences. The BACB credentialing system has spawned well over 200 approved academic course sequences, most of which did not exist prior to the certification program. These programs have provided college and university employment for many faculty and training for thousands of students. Over 10,000 individuals have earned BACB certification, and the annual growth in this cohort continues to accelerate. Over the years, Jerry guided the BACB to increase training, testing, continuing education, and monitoring standards, thereby advancing the field and improving its delivery of ABA services. As a predictable side effect of the BACB credentials, federal, provincial, and state governments have taken account of these credentials in statutes, rules, and policies, including those relating to insurance coverage of ABA services. Private service providers have adapted their hiring standards and services to the availability of BACB certificants. Perhaps most important, their availability means that individuals and families in need are able to access ABA services with confidence in a professional credential. In spite of all this, Jerry Shook's legacy to our field will take some years to reach full flower. Although the BACB credentialing program has already had an enormous impact on the field, its significance will continue to grow over the next 10 years and beyond.

It is difficult to imagine the field of applied behavior analysis today without Jerry's leadership and contributions. His achievements have been widely recognized and honored by many organizations over the years, including an Outreach Award in 1988 from the Society for the Advancement of Behavior Analysis (SABA), an Outstanding Service Award from the Association for Behavior Analysis in 1994 and 1998, and a Public Service in Behavior Analysis award from SABA in 1999.

For the many colleagues who knew and worked with Jerry, his passing is more than an occasion to recognize

his contributions. He was a mentor and a dear friend to many. His seriousness of purpose and devotion to our field were always matched by his humility and ready laugh. To all who knew him, he was a model of moderation and patience when facing challenges, optimism for the future of our discipline, and warm collegiality. His passing was far too soon, and we will all miss him in many ways.

REFERENCE

- Maurice, C. (1993). *Let me hear your voice*. New York: Random House.